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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1963  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 6840  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7866  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0393  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2683  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 4847  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 1516  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 9802  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1898  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000897

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/20/2017

TAGS: PK PREL PTER

SUBJECT: MOSQUE DESTRUCTION STANDOFF CONTINUES TO CHALLENGE  
GOVERNMENT

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 0625  
¶B. ISLAMABAD 22512  
¶C. ISLAMABAD 189

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. Four weeks in, approximately 200 female students of the Madrassa Hafza continue to occupy a children's library to protest the Islamabad Capital Development Authority's initiative to raze and relocate illegally constructed mosques. Reporters who have visited the girls and women occupying the library tell us that the rooms surrounding the sit-in area are staffed by heavily armed male militants, including some with known ties to al-Qa'ida. (Note: According to press reports, the Lal Mosque, which adjoins the madrassa, has in the past frequently broadcast al-Qa'ida propaganda over its loudspeakers. End note.) Ongoing negotiations with "representatives" of the girls/women -- and significant government concessions that include empowering a 12-member committee of ulema with making the final decision on mosque destruction -- have not swayed the leadership of the Madrassa. A desire to avoid actions that would injure or kill young girls, along with political sensitivities this election year, have motivated the government to act with extreme caution, despite growing public sentiment that the standoff poses a direct challenge to the government's writ and to its anti-militancy rhetoric. The Interior Ministry and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police have prepared for an operation to end the sit-in, bringing 700 female police officers and extra riot gear to the capital two weeks ago, but sources say senior government officials remain reticent about authorizing the action. End summary.

Girls' Sit-in, Into Week 4, Becomes Talk Of The Town

¶12. (SBU) Roughly 200 female students of the Jamia Hafza Madrassa continue their four-week-old sit-in at a government owned children's library adjacent to the Lal Mosque (ref A). The girls and women are protesting the Capital Development

Authority (CDA)'s initiative to demolish and relocate illegally constructed mosques and madrassas, including a portion of their own institution. Government officials, in an attempt to settle the standoff peacefully, have engaged in a series of protracted negotiations and made significant concessions. On February 12, the Minister of Religious Affairs, negotiating on behalf of the government, announced a settlement: the girls would leave the library if the CDA would cease issuing demolition notices to illegally constructed mosques. The government has authorized a 12-member committee of ulema to decide which mosques were impinging on government road or development projects and to negotiate alternate sites to relocate such facilities. The government also agreed to rebuild one of the mosques the CDA demolished earlier in February.

¶3. (SBU) The concessions did not end the standoff. In subsequent days the girls escalated their redlines, demanding the government legalize all 81 mosques the development authority previously cited as "illegally built on government land," as well as to legalize the sections of their madrassa that the government recently announced it would demolish because it exceeded the size limits allowed in the original building permit. The students also demand the enforcement of sharia in Pakistan.

#### Operation Iminent...For Two Weeks

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¶4. (C) Government officials from the CDA, Interior Ministry, and Capital Police tell poloffs that they have been planning an "operation" against the girls at the madrassa since February 2nd. On February 5, Interior Minister Sherpao was

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quoted as saying, "we have utilized all options for a peaceful solution...we are left with no other option but using our authority to end the illegal occupation." A few days later, the Interior Minister ordered 700 female police from across Punjab to come to Islamabad with riot-gear; they were to form the back-bone of the operation against the students. As of this week, no operation has been launched, but Interior Minister Sherpao told the Ambassador on February 23rd that the Ministry "knows who the bad guys are" among those occupying the library and is working carefully get women and girls out before engaging the heavily armed militants. Contacts tell post that only President Musharraf and Prime Minister Aziz can authorize the politically sensitive operation.

¶5. (C) Comment. The government's inaction against the occupation --and its eagerness to negotiate away government prerogatives -- has been the talk of Islamabad's intelligentsia for weeks. Ruling party, opposition, and media contacts all say the government looks weak, torn between enforcing the law and kow-towing to religious parties. The same contacts also note, though, that police actions leading to the deaths of teenage girls would be morally unacceptable, not to mention politically disastrous. In the end, the entire episode underscores the moral depravity of the militants who are using girls as human shields--and the imperative that the government continue its fight against such extremism. End comment.

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